

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 — The Search for Pleasure, Work, and Wisdom

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 continues the Preacher's search for the meaning of life.

In Chapter 1, he examined:

Human labor.

The cycles of creation.

The repetition of history.

The limits of wisdom.

The fleeting nature of human life.

Now he turns toward some of the things people most commonly pursue in the hope of finding satisfaction.

He examines:

Pleasure.

Laughter.

Wine.

Great building projects.

Gardens.

Possessions.

Wealth.

Music.

Achievement.

Wisdom.

Work.

Legacy.

The Preacher does not merely imagine what these things might be like.

He experiences them.

He possesses the resources to test them thoroughly.

He denies himself very little.

He builds.

He accumulates.

He enjoys.

He studies.

He accomplishes.

Yet after examining everything, he reaches the same conclusion:

None of these things can provide lasting satisfaction by themselves.

Pleasure fades.

Achievement cannot defeat death.

Wisdom cannot prevent mortality.

Wealth must eventually be left to someone else.

Labor can become exhausting.

Possessions can become burdens.

But near the end of the chapter, the Preacher discovers an important truth.

Food.

Work.

Enjoyment.

Wisdom.

Knowledge.

Joy.

All these things can be good when they are received as gifts from God.

The problem is not necessarily the gift.

The problem is trying to enjoy the gift apart from the Giver.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 2 is:

Pleasure, achievement, wisdom, and wealth cannot give lasting meaning to life, but ordinary blessings become sources of genuine joy when they are received from the hand of God.

I. THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

Ecclesiastes 2:1 — “I Will Test You with Pleasure”

“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself!’ But behold, this too was meaningless.”

The Preacher deliberately begins an experiment.

He asks:

Can pleasure satisfy the human heart?

He does not merely taste pleasure occasionally.

He makes it a major part of his search.

He tells himself:

Enjoy yourself.

Experience what life has to offer.

Yet afterward he reaches the same conclusion:

Pleasure alone cannot give lasting meaning.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:11

Then I looked carefully at everything my hands had accomplished and all the work I had done. I realized that it was all temporary and like chasing the wind. Nothing I had gained under the sun could provide lasting profit.

Luke 12:19

The rich man said to himself, “You have stored up plenty of good things for many years. Relax now. Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.”

1 Peter 4:3

You have already spent enough of your past life doing what people who do not know God desire to do, living in uncontrolled desires, drunkenness, wild parties, drinking, and sinful forms of worship.

Spiritual Principle

Pleasure can entertain the heart without satisfying the soul.

Key Truth

Enjoyment is not wrong.

But enjoyment becomes empty when it is expected to provide the meaning only God can give.

II. LAUGHTER CANNOT SOLVE LIFE'S DEEPEST QUESTIONS

Ecclesiastes 2:2 — “What Good Does It Bring?”

“I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What good does it bring?’”

Laughter can be good.

Joy can be healthy.

But constant entertainment cannot remove:

Death.

Loss.

Sin.

Loneliness.

Injustice.

Fear.

The Preacher discovers that amusement is unable to answer the deepest questions of life.

Cross References

Proverbs 14:13

Even while a person is laughing, the heart may still be hurting, and when the laughter ends, sadness may remain.

Ecclesiastes 7:6

The laughter of fools is like dry thorns crackling quickly under a cooking pot. It makes a lot of noise but does not last. This too is empty.

James 4:9

Take your sin seriously. Grieve and mourn over it. Let careless laughter turn into sorrow and shallow joy into serious repentance.

Spiritual Principle

Laughter can temporarily cover pain without healing it.

Application

There is a time for laughter.

But there are problems that entertainment cannot fix.

III. THE EXPERIMENT WITH WINE AND FOOLISHNESS

Ecclesiastes 2:3 — Searching for What Is Worthwhile

“I tried cheering myself with wine, while still guiding myself with wisdom. I wanted to experience foolishness, to see what was worthwhile for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.”

The Preacher continues his experiment.

He explores pleasure through wine while attempting to maintain enough self-control to observe the results.

He is asking:

What is actually worth doing during a short human life?

The experiment itself reveals his desperation.

He is searching everywhere for something lasting.

Cross References

Proverbs 20:1

Wine can mock a person, and strong drink can lead to loud and foolish behavior. Anyone controlled by it is not acting wisely.

Ecclesiastes 9:7

Go and enjoy your food with gratitude, and drink with a glad heart, because God has already allowed you to receive and enjoy His gifts.

Isaiah 5:11

How tragic it is for those who rise early to chase strong drink and continue late into the evening until wine controls and inflames them.

Spiritual Principle

A substance can change a person's mood without changing the condition of the heart.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Anything used to escape reality eventually becomes a poor substitute for facing reality with God.

IV. THE PREACHER BUILDS GREAT PROJECTS

Ecclesiastes 2:4 — Houses and Vineyards

“I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.”

When pleasure does not satisfy, the Preacher turns to achievement.

He builds.

He creates.

He expands.

He surrounds himself with visible evidence of success.

Large projects can produce a strong sense of accomplishment.

But even achievement has limits.

Cross References

1 Kings 9:1

After Solomon finished building the house of the Lord, the royal palace, and everything else he had desired to build, the Lord appeared to him again.

2 Chronicles 8:1

At the end of twenty years, Solomon had completed the construction of the Lord’s house and his own palace.

Deuteronomy 8:12

Be careful that after you have eaten and are satisfied, built fine houses, and settled comfortably in them, you do not forget the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

Achievement can fill a schedule while leaving the heart empty.

V. GARDENS, PARKS, AND BEAUTY

Ecclesiastes 2:5 — Creating Beautiful Places

“I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.”

The Preacher surrounds himself with beauty.

He creates cultivated spaces.

Gardens.

Trees.

Parks.

Fruit.

These things could provide real enjoyment.

But even beauty cannot provide eternal satisfaction.

Cross References

Genesis 2:8

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there He placed the man He had formed.

1 Kings 4:33

Solomon spoke with knowledge about plants, from the great cedar trees of Lebanon down to the small plants growing from walls. He also spoke about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish.

2 Chronicles 26:10

King Uzziah built towers in the wilderness and dug many wells because he owned much livestock. He also had farmers and vineyard workers because he loved working the land.

Spiritual Principle

Beauty is a gift.

But created beauty should lead us toward the Creator.

VI. POOLS FOR IRRIGATION

Ecclesiastes 2:6 — Controlling Water for Growth

“I made pools of water to irrigate a forest of growing trees.”

The Preacher continues expanding his projects.

He develops water systems.

He creates infrastructure.

He makes the land productive.

This is not laziness.

It is enormous activity.

But activity alone does not guarantee meaning.

Cross References

Nehemiah 2:14

Nehemiah continued toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was so much rubble that the animal he was riding could not pass through.

Nehemiah 3:15

Shallum repaired the Fountain Gate, rebuilt it, covered it, installed its doors, bolts, and bars, and also repaired the wall near the Pool of Shelah by the king's garden.

Isaiah 22:11

You made a reservoir between the walls to collect water from the old pool, but you did not look to the God who made these things or recognize the One who planned them long ago.

Spiritual Principle

Human planning can accomplish much.

But success becomes dangerous when we forget the God who made accomplishment possible.

VII. SERVANTS, HERDS, AND FLOCKS

Ecclesiastes 2:7 — Growing Possessions

“I bought male and female servants and had others born in my house. I also owned herds and flocks more than anyone in Jerusalem before me.”

The Preacher's household expands.

His possessions multiply.

His livestock exceeds that of those who came before him.

By ancient standards, this represents enormous wealth.

Yet quantity does not create contentment.

Cross References

Genesis 12:16

Pharaoh treated Abram well because of Sarai, and Abram received sheep, cattle, donkeys, servants, female donkeys, and camels.

Genesis 26:14

Isaac possessed many flocks, herds, and servants, and his prosperity became so great that the Philistines became jealous of him.

1 Kings 4:23

Solomon's daily provisions included cattle, sheep, and other animals in great abundance to supply his household and royal court.

Spiritual Principle

Having more does not guarantee wanting less.

VIII. SILVER, GOLD, AND ENTERTAINMENT

Ecclesiastes 2:8 — Wealth and Music

“I amassed silver and gold for myself, the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men—musical instruments of all kinds.”

The Preacher gathers wealth.

Gold.

Silver.

Royal treasure.

Entertainment.

Music.

He surrounds himself with everything designed to make life enjoyable.

He had access to what many people spend their lives pursuing.

Yet these things could not satisfy him permanently.

Cross References

1 Kings 10:14

The amount of gold Solomon received in a single year weighed about six hundred sixty-six talents.

2 Chronicles 9:20

All of King Solomon's drinking cups were made of gold, and everything in the House of the Forest of Lebanon was made of pure gold. Silver was considered of little value during Solomon's reign.

1 Chronicles 25:1

David and the leaders set apart musicians from the families of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to serve through music with harps, lyres, and cymbals.

Spiritual Principle

Luxury can improve comfort without producing spiritual contentment.

IX. SOLOMON BECOMES GREAT

Ecclesiastes 2:9 — Greater Than Those Before Him

“I became greater and wealthier than all who were before me in Jerusalem, yet my wisdom stayed with me.”

The Preacher reaches the top.

He possesses:

Wealth.

Power.

Influence.

Wisdom.

Success.

By ordinary human standards, he has won.

Yet reaching the top does not answer the question:

What now?

Cross References

1 Kings 10:23

King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.

2 Chronicles 1:1

Solomon, the son of David, became firmly established as king, and the Lord his God was with him and made him exceedingly great.

2 Chronicles 9:22

King Solomon became greater than all the other kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.

Spiritual Principle

Success can bring a person to the top without telling him what the top is for.

X. HE DENIED HIMSELF NOTHING

Ecclesiastes 2:10 — Whatever My Eyes Desired

“Whatever my eyes desired I did not deny them. I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart found delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.”

The Preacher practices almost unrestricted self-gratification.

If he wants something:

He gets it.

If something looks attractive:

He pursues it.

If it promises pleasure:

He experiences it.

For a time, there is enjoyment.

That is important.

Sin and self-indulgence can provide temporary pleasure.

The problem is that temporary pleasure is not lasting fulfillment.

Cross References

Job 31:1

Job said, “I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not look lustfully at a young woman.”

Numbers 15:39

When you see the tassels on your clothing, remember all the Lord’s commands and obey them. Do not follow the desires of your own heart and eyes, which can lead you away from God.

1 John 2:16

Everything connected with this fallen world—the desires of the flesh, the desire for what the eyes see, and pride in possessions and achievements—does not come from the Father but from the world.

Spiritual Principle

Desire is a poor master.

Application

Not everything you want should be obtained.

Not everything you can experience should be pursued.

XI. THE FINAL VERDICT ON ACHIEVEMENT

Ecclesiastes 2:11 — Chasing the Wind

“Yet when I looked at all I had achieved and the work I had done, behold, everything was meaningless—a chasing after the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”

The experiment reaches its conclusion.

Solomon looks at:

The houses.

The gardens.

The wealth.

The music.

The servants.

The projects.

The pleasure.

And asks:

What permanent gain did any of it produce?

His answer:

None.

Not in the ultimate sense.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I examined all the activities people perform under the sun, and I saw that everything was temporary and like trying to catch the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2:17

So I became deeply discouraged with life because everything done under the sun seemed grievous to me. It all appeared temporary and like chasing the wind.

Romans 8:20

Creation was subjected to frustration and emptiness, not because it willingly chose that condition, but because God allowed it as part of His larger redemptive purpose.

Spiritual Principle

Accomplishment without eternal purpose eventually feels empty.

XII. THE PREACHER TURNS TO WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 2:12 — Wisdom, Madness, and Folly

“Then I turned to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. For what can anyone do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.”

Having tested pleasure, the Preacher now compares wisdom and foolishness.

Can wisdom succeed where pleasure failed?

Wisdom clearly has advantages.

But will it provide ultimate meaning?

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:9

What has happened before will happen again, and what people have done before will be done again. There is nothing completely new under the sun.

1 Kings 3:12

God told Solomon, “I have given you what you asked for—a wise and understanding heart unlike anyone before you, and no one after you will have wisdom exactly like yours.”

Ecclesiastes 2:19

Who knows whether the person who receives everything I worked for will be wise or foolish? Yet that person will control everything I produced through my wisdom and labor under the sun.

Spiritual Principle

Human wisdom has value, but even the wisest person cannot escape every limitation of human life.

XIII. WISDOM IS BETTER THAN FOOLISHNESS

Ecclesiastes 2:13 — Light Is Better Than Darkness

“I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.”

The Preacher does not say wisdom and foolishness are equal.

Wisdom is clearly better.

Wisdom helps a person:

Make better decisions.

Recognize danger.

Understand consequences.

Live with greater discernment.

Wisdom is like light.

Foolishness is like darkness.

Cross References

Proverbs 4:18

The path of righteous people is like the first light of morning, growing brighter and brighter until the day reaches full light.

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to overcome it.

Ephesians 5:8

You once lived in spiritual darkness, but now you belong to the Lord and live in His light. Therefore, live like people whose lives reflect that light.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom is genuinely better than foolishness, even if wisdom cannot solve every problem.

XIV. WISDOM SEES; FOOLISHNESS WALKS IN DARKNESS

Ecclesiastes 2:14 — Yet Both Die

“The wise have eyes in their heads, but fools walk in darkness. Yet I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.”

The wise person sees where he is going.

The fool stumbles blindly.

But death eventually comes to both.

Wisdom can improve the journey.

It cannot eliminate the grave.

Cross References

Proverbs 17:24

A person with understanding keeps wisdom clearly in view, but the eyes of a fool wander everywhere without direction.

Ecclesiastes 9:2

The same earthly destiny eventually comes to everyone—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, the one who sacrifices and the one who does not.

Hebrews 9:27

Every person is appointed to die once, and after death comes judgment.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom can change how we live.

It cannot remove the reality of death.

XV. IF BOTH DIE, WHAT HAS WISDOM GAINED?

Ecclesiastes 2:15 — The Preacher Questions Wisdom

“Then I said in my heart, ‘If the fool’s end will be my end also, what have I gained by being wise?’ This too is meaningless.”

The Preacher is not saying wisdom has no value.

He has already said wisdom is better than folly.

His frustration comes from realizing:

Both the wise person and the fool eventually die.

If death is the final horizon, even wisdom seems unable to provide ultimate advantage.

Cross References

Psalms 49:10

Everyone can see that wise people die, and foolish and senseless people also perish, leaving their wealth to others.

Job 21:23

One person dies while still strong and prosperous, living with comfort and security.

Ecclesiastes 2:16

Neither the wise person nor the fool will be remembered forever. In future days both will eventually be forgotten, and both will die.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom needs an eternal perspective or death eventually overshadows its achievements.

XVI. BOTH THE WISE AND THE FOOL ARE FORGOTTEN

Ecclesiastes 2:16 — Human Memory Fades

“For the wise, like the fool, will not be remembered forever. In the days to come, both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise must also die.”

Wisdom cannot guarantee lasting fame.

Human memory is short.

Generations forget.

Names disappear.

Achievements become footnotes.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:11

People do not remember most of those who lived before them, and future generations will also forget much of what happens now.

Ecclesiastes 9:5

The living know that they will die, but those who have died no longer participate in earthly life, and the earthly reward connected with their labor is gone as their memory fades.

Job 3:19

In death, the small and the great are together, and the servant is finally free from the demands of his master.

Spiritual Principle

Being remembered by people is temporary.

Being known by God is eternal.

XVII. THE PREACHER BECOMES WEARY OF LIFE

Ecclesiastes 2:17 — Everything Felt Grievous

“So I hated life, because the work done under the sun was grievous to me. Everything is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

The Preacher reaches a low point.

His disappointment becomes emotional.

What looked impressive from the outside now feels empty from the inside.

This reveals how dangerous it is to build one’s entire identity around temporary achievements.

Cross References

Job 7:16

Job said, “I despise my life. I do not want to live forever. Leave me alone, because my days pass quickly like a breath.”

Job 10:1

Job said, “I am weary of my life, so I will freely express my complaint and speak from the bitterness I feel inside.”

Philippians 1:21

Paul said, “For me, living means serving Christ, and dying means entering something even better.”

Spiritual Principle

Life becomes unbearable when temporary things are forced to carry eternal expectations.

XVIII. EVERYTHING MUST BE LEFT BEHIND

Ecclesiastes 2:18 — Someone Else Will Receive It

“I hated all the things I had worked for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.”

This realization troubles the Preacher deeply.

He worked.

Planned.

Built.

Accumulated.

Yet eventually everything must be handed to someone else.

Ownership is temporary.

Cross References

Psalm 39:6

People move through life like passing shadows. They work anxiously to gather possessions, yet they do not know who will eventually receive what they have collected.

Ecclesiastes 6:2

God may give a person wealth, possessions, and honor so that he lacks nothing he desires, yet if God does not allow him to enjoy those things, someone else may benefit from them.

Luke 12:20

God said to the rich man, “You foolish man! Tonight your life will be required from you. Then who will receive everything you have stored up?”

Spiritual Principle

You may manage possessions for a time.

You do not keep them forever.

XIX. WHO KNOWS WHAT THE NEXT PERSON WILL DO?

Ecclesiastes 2:19 — Wise or Foolish?

“And who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor into which I poured my wisdom under the sun. This too is meaningless.”

The Preacher’s frustration deepens.

It is not merely that someone else will receive his work.

That person may misuse it.

Everything Solomon built could eventually fall into the hands of someone foolish.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:21

A person may work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, only to leave everything he earned to someone who never worked for it. This too is deeply frustrating.

Job 27:17

A wicked person may collect clothing, but a righteous person may eventually wear it, and the silver he gathered may be divided among others.

Psalms 49:10

Wise people die just as fools and senseless people die, and they leave their wealth behind for someone else.

Spiritual Principle

Legacy is uncertain when it depends only upon possessions.

Application

A spiritual legacy is more valuable than merely leaving material wealth.

XX. DESPAIR OVER LABOR

Ecclesiastes 2:20 — The Heart Begins to Despair

“So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.”

The Preacher realizes he cannot control what happens to his work after he is gone.

The result is despair.

His achievement has become a burden because he expected it to produce lasting meaning.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:11

When I examined everything I had accomplished and all the work I had done, I realized it was temporary and like chasing the wind. Nothing under the sun gave lasting profit.

Job 7:3

I have been given months filled with emptiness, and nights of misery have been assigned to me.

2 Corinthians 4:8

We are pressured from every direction, but we are not crushed. We are sometimes confused and uncertain, but we do not give up in despair.

Spiritual Principle

Despair grows when identity is attached to things we cannot control.

XXI. SOMEONE ELSE MAY RECEIVE WHAT YOU BUILT

Ecclesiastes 2:21 — Labor Without Permanent Control

“For a man may labor with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then leave it all to someone who has not worked for it. This also is meaningless and a great evil.”

A person may spend decades building something.

Then another person receives it without sharing in the work.

The Preacher sees this as deeply frustrating when life is viewed only under the sun.

Cross References

Proverbs 13:22

A good person leaves an inheritance for his children and grandchildren, while the wealth of sinners is eventually stored up for those who live rightly.

Job 27:16

A wicked person may pile up silver like dust and collect fine clothing in great amounts.

Ecclesiastes 5:14

Wealth can disappear through some unfortunate event, leaving a person with nothing to pass on to his children.

Spiritual Principle

The value of your life cannot be measured only by what you leave behind materially.

XXII. WHAT DOES WORK REALLY GAIN?

Ecclesiastes 2:22 — Toil and Anxiety

“What does a man gain from all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?”

This echoes the major question from Ecclesiastes 1:3.

The Preacher asks again:

What permanent profit comes from all this labor?

Work can provide income.

Achievement.

Service.

Dignity.

But it cannot defeat mortality.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:3

What lasting profit does a person really gain from all the hard work he performs under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 3:9

What lasting gain does the worker receive from all his labor?

Mark 8:36

What good would it do for a person to gain the entire world and yet lose his own soul?

Spiritual Principle

The greatest possible earthly gain is worthless if the soul is neglected.

XXIII. WORK CAN FOLLOW A PERSON INTO THE NIGHT

Ecclesiastes 2:23 — No Rest for the Heart

“All his days are filled with pain, and grief occupies his work. Even at night his heart finds no rest. This too is meaningless.”

Work can become so consuming that the body leaves the workplace but the mind does not.

Anxiety continues.

Problems replay.

The heart cannot rest.

The Preacher understands that work becomes destructive when it becomes the center of life.

Cross References

Job 5:7

Human beings are born into trouble as surely as sparks from a fire rise upward.

Job 14:1

A person born into this world has only a short life, and those days are filled with trouble.

Psalms 90:10

Our lives may reach seventy years, or eighty if we are strong, yet even our best years contain labor and sorrow. Life passes quickly, and soon we are gone.

Spiritual Principle

Work should serve life.

Life should not become enslaved to work.

XXIV. ENJOYMENT IS A GIFT FROM GOD

Ecclesiastes 2:24 — Food, Drink, and Satisfaction

“There is nothing better for a man than to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I saw, comes from the hand of God.”

This verse marks an important turning point.

The Preacher does not say:

Stop working.

Stop eating.

Stop enjoying life.

Instead, he says true enjoyment comes when these things are received:

From the hand of God.

The difference is enormous.

Possessions cannot create meaning.

But God can give meaning to the ordinary gifts of life.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 3:13

Every person should eat, drink, and enjoy the good that comes from his work, because the ability to enjoy these things is a gift from God.

Ecclesiastes 5:18

I have seen that it is good and fitting for a person to eat, drink, and enjoy the results of his work during the short life God has given him, because this is his portion.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Whether you eat, drink, or do anything else, do everything in a way that brings glory to God.

Spiritual Principle

Enjoyment becomes healthy when it produces gratitude rather than idolatry.

Key Truth

The secret is not merely possessing more.

The secret is receiving what God gives with gratitude.

XXV. TRUE ENJOYMENT CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM GOD

Ecclesiastes 2:25 — “Apart from Him”

“For who can eat, or who can find enjoyment, apart from Him?”

The Preacher has finally discovered something his experiment could not manufacture.

Joy itself is a gift.

A person may possess:

Food.

Money.

Time.

Resources.

Opportunity.

And still lack the ability to enjoy them.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:10

I did not hold back anything my eyes wanted, and I did not refuse my heart any pleasure. I found temporary enjoyment in my work, and that enjoyment was my immediate reward.

1 Kings 3:13

God told Solomon, “I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and honor—so that during your lifetime no other king will compare with you.”

Philippians 4:12

I know how to live with very little, and I also know how to live with plenty. In every circumstance I have learned the secret of being content, whether well fed or hungry, whether having much or having little.

Spiritual Principle

Contentment depends less upon what you possess than upon your relationship with God.

XXVI. GOD GIVES WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, AND JOY

Ecclesiastes 2:26 — The Final Contrast

“To the one who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But to the sinner He gives the burden of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

The chapter ends with God.

That is important.

The Preacher began by experimenting with pleasure.

He ends by recognizing that true enjoyment cannot be manufactured.

God gives:

Wisdom.

Knowledge.

Joy.

Without God, gathering wealth becomes another exhausting cycle.

Cross References

Proverbs 28:8

A person who increases wealth by charging unfair interest may eventually be collecting it for someone who will use it with kindness toward the poor.

Daniel 2:21

God changes times and seasons. He removes kings and raises others up. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who understand.

James 4:14

You do not know what tomorrow will bring. Your life is like a mist that appears for a short time and then disappears.

Spiritual Principle

God does not merely give possessions.

He gives the capacity to use and enjoy life rightly.

XXVII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 2

1. Pleasure Without God Is Empty

The Preacher explored:

Laughter.

Wine.

Entertainment.

Desire.

None gave him lasting satisfaction.

Principle:

Pleasure can refresh the emotions temporarily, but it cannot give eternal purpose.

2. Achievement Cannot Satisfy the Soul

Solomon built:

Houses.

Vineyards.

Gardens.

Pools.

Great estates.

Yet afterward he still said:

“Chasing after the wind.”

Principle:

What you build cannot become the foundation of who you are.

3. Wealth Cannot Guarantee Contentment

Solomon possessed extraordinary riches.

Yet wealth could not give him lasting peace.

Principle:

The ability to buy something does not guarantee the ability to enjoy it.

4. Wisdom Is Better Than Folly

Wisdom is compared to light.

Foolishness is compared to darkness.

Wisdom matters.

But wisdom cannot defeat death.

Principle:

Wisdom improves life, but only God gives life eternal meaning.

5. Work Can Become an Idol

The Preacher became so consumed with the meaning of his labor that it eventually produced despair.

Principle:

Work is a gift when it serves God; it becomes a burden when it replaces God.

6. Earthly Possessions Must Eventually Be Left Behind

Someone else receives:

The money.

The property.

The business.

The possessions.

Principle:

Stewardship is temporary. Eternity is permanent.

7. True Enjoyment Comes from God

The Preacher finally recognizes:

Food is a gift.

Work is a gift.

Joy is a gift.

Contentment is a gift.

Principle:

The good life is not found merely in having gifts but in receiving them gratefully from the Giver.

XXVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 2 TEACHES ABOUT PLEASURE

Pleasure is not presented as inherently sinful.

The problem is expecting pleasure to do something it cannot do.

Pleasure can:

Refresh.

Entertain.

Comfort.

Delight.

But pleasure cannot:

Forgive sin.

Defeat death.

Give eternal life.

Provide permanent identity.

Guarantee contentment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Enjoy God's gifts.

But never ask pleasure to become your god.

XXIX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 2 TEACHES ABOUT WORK

Work can be:

Productive.

Rewarding.

Creative.

Useful.

Honorable.

But work becomes dangerous when it defines the entire person.

The Preacher learned:

You can build something impressive.

Someone else may inherit it.

You can work wisely.

Someone else may misuse the results.

You can become successful.

Death still comes.

Key Truth

Work has value when it is received as a calling and gift from God rather than treated as the source of ultimate meaning.

XXX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 2 TEACHES ABOUT WEALTH

Solomon had almost unlimited resources.

He possessed:

Gold.

Silver.

Livestock.

Servants.

Houses.

Land.

Entertainment.

Yet wealth did not give him what he was truly searching for.

Spiritual Principle

Money is useful.

But money is a poor savior.

It can purchase:

Food.

Shelter.

Transportation.

Comfort.

Entertainment.

But it cannot purchase:

Peace with God.

Eternal life.

A clear conscience.

True spiritual joy.

XXXI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 2 TEACHES ABOUT CONTENTMENT

The great discovery comes near the end of the chapter.

Contentment does not come simply by increasing possessions.

The Preacher had more than almost everyone.

Still, he struggled.

True contentment comes from learning to recognize life as a gift from God.

Food becomes meaningful.

Work becomes meaningful.

Rest becomes meaningful.

Relationships become meaningful.

Ordinary life becomes meaningful.

Not because those things become eternal.

But because they are received from the eternal God.

XXXII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did the Preacher pursue pleasure?

He was testing whether pleasure could provide lasting meaning and satisfaction.

He wanted to determine what was truly worthwhile during the short span of human life.

Question 2

Did pleasure satisfy him?

No.

It produced temporary enjoyment but not lasting fulfillment.

He ultimately described it as meaningless when treated as the purpose of life.

Question 3

Why did he build so many projects?

The Preacher tested whether achievement could provide the meaning pleasure failed to give.

He built:

Houses.

Vineyards.

Gardens.

Parks.

Pools.

Large estates.

But achievement also failed to satisfy him permanently.

Question 4

Why is Ecclesiastes 2:10 important?

It shows that Solomon did not merely theorize about pleasure.

He denied himself very little.

He experienced what his eyes desired.

Therefore, his conclusion came from experience rather than speculation.

Question 5

What did Solomon conclude after examining everything he accomplished?

He concluded that it was like:

“Chasing after the wind.”

His accomplishments gave temporary satisfaction but no lasting gain under the sun.

Question 6

Is wisdom better than foolishness?

Yes.

The Preacher clearly says wisdom is better than folly just as light is better than darkness.

Wisdom helps people navigate life more effectively.

But wisdom cannot remove mortality.

Question 7

Why did death trouble the Preacher so much?

Because both the wise and foolish eventually die.

If life is viewed only under the sun, death appears to erase many of the advantages gained through wisdom and achievement.

Question 8

Why did Solomon become frustrated with his possessions?

He realized he would have to leave them to another person.

Even worse, he had no guarantee that the next person would use them wisely.

Question 9

What does Ecclesiastes 2 teach about work?

Work is good when received as a gift from God.

But work becomes empty and exhausting when it becomes the ultimate meaning of life.

Question 10

What does verse 23 teach about anxiety?

Work can become so consuming that the mind continues working even when the body is trying to rest.

This can produce sleeplessness, grief, and mental exhaustion.

Question 11

What is the turning point of the chapter?

The turning point comes when the Preacher recognizes that ordinary enjoyment comes:

“From the hand of God.”

The issue is not merely what we possess.

The issue is whether we receive it with gratitude toward God.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 2 change about our lives?

It should teach us to stop expecting:

Pleasure.

Work.

Money.

Achievement.

Wisdom.

Possessions.

To provide what only God can provide.

We should enjoy these things without worshipping them.

XXXIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 2 asks us several important questions.

Am I Trying to Find Meaning Through Pleasure?

What do I run toward when I feel empty?

Is My Work Becoming My Identity?

If my career disappeared tomorrow, would I still know who I am?

Do I Believe More Possessions Will Finally Satisfy Me?

How much is enough?

Am I Living According to Whatever My Eyes Desire?

Do I practice self-control?

Do I Confuse Success with Spiritual health?

A person can be successful and spiritually empty.

Am I Building a Legacy That Is Only Material?

What spiritual inheritance am I leaving?

Can I Enjoy Ordinary Blessings?

Food.

Work.

Rest.

Family.

Friendship.

Daily provision.

Do I receive them with gratitude?

Is My Contentment Connected to God?

Or must circumstances always improve before I can be thankful?

XXXIV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gift Cannot Replace the Giver”

Solomon tested nearly every major path people still pursue today.

Pleasure.

Money.

Success.

Achievement.

Knowledge.

Entertainment.

Possessions.

None of these things were automatically evil.

The problem came when they were asked to provide:

Identity.

Meaning.

Security.

Fulfillment.

Eternal significance.

They could not carry that weight.

A house can shelter you.

It cannot save you.

Money can provide comfort.

It cannot forgive you.

Entertainment can distract you.

It cannot heal the soul.

Work can give you accomplishment.

It cannot defeat death.

Knowledge can inform you.

It cannot reconcile you to God.

Principle:

God's gifts become burdens when we ask them to do what only God can do.

XXXV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAVING AND ENJOYING

One of the most important truths in Ecclesiastes 2 is the difference between:

Having something.

And:

Enjoying something.

Solomon had much.

But possession did not guarantee contentment.

A person can have:

Money.

And worry constantly about losing it.

Food.

And lack gratitude.

A home.

And live without peace.

A career.

And resent every day of work.

Relationships.

And fail to value them.

The ability to enjoy life is itself a gift.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You do not need to own everything to enjoy life.

You need to recognize what God has already placed in your hands.

XXXVI. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 takes us through one of the most extensive experiments in human satisfaction ever described.

The Preacher tried:

Pleasure.

Laughter.

Wine.

Great projects.

Beautiful gardens.

Wealth.

Servants.

Livestock.

Music.

Entertainment.

Achievement.

Wisdom.

Work.

He had the resources to pursue nearly anything he wanted.

And for a time:

He enjoyed it.

That is important.

Ecclesiastes is not pretending that earthly pleasures never feel good.

They often do.

The problem is that the feeling does not last.

Eventually the question returns:

Is this all there is?

The Preacher stood among everything he had created and realized:

I cannot keep it forever.

I cannot guarantee what happens to it after I die.

I cannot prevent death through wisdom.

I cannot make pleasure permanent.

I cannot make possessions eternal.

Then the chapter turns.

The Preacher recognizes:

Life itself is a gift.

Food is a gift.

Work is a gift.

Enjoyment is a gift.

Wisdom is a gift.

Joy is a gift.

And these gifts become meaningful when they are received:

From the hand of God.

That changes everything.

The Christian does not need to reject every earthly blessing.

We should instead learn to receive blessings rightly.

Eat with gratitude.

Work with purpose.

Enjoy what God gives.

Share generously.

Hold possessions loosely.

Live wisely.

Remember eternity.

The question is not merely:

“What do I have?”

The greater question is:

“Who gave it to me, and am I using it for His glory?”

Do not spend your life chasing pleasure.

Do not spend your life trying to prove your worth through achievement.

Do not assume wealth will quiet the heart.

Do not allow work to steal your soul.

Do not postpone gratitude until you finally have enough.

Receive today as a gift.

Receive your work as a gift.

Receive your food as a gift.

Receive your opportunities as gifts.

Receive joy as a gift.

And above every gift:

Seek the Giver.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom You give us through Ecclesiastes.

Thank You for showing us the limitations of pleasure, wealth, achievement, and human wisdom.

Protect us from spending our lives chasing things that cannot satisfy us.

When we are tempted to believe that pleasure will make us complete, remind us that temporary enjoyment cannot fill an eternal soul.

When we are tempted to measure ourselves by our accomplishments, remind us that our value does not come from what we build.

When we become consumed with possessions, teach us to hold them loosely.

When our eyes desire more, give us self-control.

When success comes, keep us humble.

When disappointment comes, keep us faithful.

Father, protect us from making work our identity.

Help us work diligently without allowing work to become our god.

Give us wisdom to know when to labor.

Give us wisdom to know when to rest.

Give us hearts that trust You with what happens after our work is finished.

Teach us to build a spiritual legacy, not merely a material one.

Help us remember that we cannot take earthly possessions with us when this life ends.

Give us an eternal perspective.

Thank You for the ordinary blessings of life.

Thank You for food.

Thank You for work.

Thank You for rest.

Thank You for relationships.

Thank You for opportunities.

Thank You for moments of joy.

Teach us to receive these blessings from Your hand.

Give us the ability to enjoy what You provide without making Your gifts into idols.

Teach us contentment.

Teach us gratitude.

Teach us generosity.

Teach us wisdom.

Teach us joy.

Help us remember that the gift can never replace the Giver.

May everything we have lead us closer to You rather than farther away.

May our work honor You.

May our possessions serve Your purposes.

May our wisdom remain humble.

May our enjoyment produce thanksgiving.

And when this earthly life is finished, may we be able to say that we did not spend our days chasing the wind.

We received Your gifts.

We served Your purposes.

And above all:

We sought You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“There is nothing better for a man than to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I saw, comes from the hand of God.” — Ecclesiastes 2:24

Central Truth

Pleasure, wealth, wisdom, achievement, and labor cannot provide lasting fulfillment by themselves; true enjoyment comes when life and its ordinary blessings are received gratefully from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 2 in One Sentence

The Preacher tests pleasure, wealth, achievement, wisdom, and work and discovers that none can overcome mortality or satisfy the soul, but food, labor, wisdom, and joy become meaningful gifts when they are received from God with gratitude.